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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002431

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FOR NEA/ELA, S/P AND DRL/NESCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2028
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: APRIL 6 ACTIVIST DESCRIBES GOE HARASSMENT,
REQUESTS INFORMATION ON YOUTH MOVEMENTS SUMMIT

REF: A. CAIRO 1581
[B](#). CAIRO 862
[C](#). CAIRO 792
[D](#). CAIRO 783

Classified By: DCM Matthew H. Tueller for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary and comment: "Youth Movement for Change" activist Ahmed Saleh, who advocates replacing the current Egyptian regime with a parliamentary democracy, called on us November 25. He described the harassment he and his colleagues face from Egyptian State Security as a "siege" that compels him to "live on the run," and detailed his brutal treatment in detention in 2006 following his participation in a sit-in at the Judges' Club. Saleh expressed interest in attending the December 3-5 "Alliance of Youth Movements Summit" in New York, but voiced concern over his participation being covered in the Egyptian press. Saleh requested additional information on the summit's program, and asked for USG assistance in scheduling meetings for him with USG officials and members of Congress. He explained how his movement tries to organize innocuous events, but is regularly thwarted by State Security, which arrests and abuses movement members. In contrast to civil society organizations that call for reforming, not replacing, the regime, Saleh and his movement take a different approach. The resulting intense security service harassment does not allow the movement to operate with effectiveness. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (S) We contacted activist Ahmed Saleh on November 24 to offer embassy assistance with any questions regarding the December 3-5 "Alliance of Youth Movements Summit" in New York. Saleh welcomed the call, and expressed ambivalence about attending the summit due to anxiety over his participation appearing in the Egyptian press. He also asked for clarification regarding the summit's schedule of events. Following a short conversation, Saleh called us back to request a meeting in the embassy to discuss "issues I can't talk about on the phone."

State Security Harassment and Detention

[1](#)3. (S) On November 25, Saleh called on us, and began by telling us he had been initially unsure whether our phone conversation the previous evening was a "trick by State Security officers pretending to be U.S. embassy personnel." Saleh described how he lives on the run from State Security, using 3 or 4 different phones to make GOE surveillance efforts more difficult and rarely sleeping at his home. To earn a living, he works as a "fixer" for international media companies, setting up appointments and interviews for journalists, and doing translations. Saleh recounted how he and his colleagues in the "Youth Movement for Change" speak on the phone in coded messages and hold informal meetings in remote restaurants where they do not believe State Security

will look for them. Saleh characterized the movement as currently "under siege" by state security. He noted that within the past week police had arrested one colleague in the movement, a Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated blogger named Mohammed Adel.

14. (S) Saleh detailed his arrest and six-week detention in April 2006 after his participation at a sit-in demonstration at the Judges Club in Cairo. He said that the police "tortured" him for the first 3 days and then placed him in a cell with heavy cigarette smokers in order to exacerbate his already existing breathing problems. Saleh noted that his health is still weak as a result of this abuse. Saleh told us that he went on a two-week hunger strike in prison and was placed in solitary confinement for three weeks. Saleh believed that the officers who mistreated him repeatedly reported his condition to senior security officials whom they addressed with respect as "General" or "Sir."

Views on the Summit and Lobbying the USG

15. (C) Saleh expressed interest in attending the December 3-5 "Alliance for Youth Movements Summit" in New York, saying that he would welcome the opportunity to meet other activists and discuss with Facebook how the company could facilitate his movement's activities by allowing them to delete users who are trying to infiltrate their on-line discussions. He stressed his view that solely attending the conference is not worth the risk of being sent back to jail, so he is interested in holding a series of meetings in the U.S. with

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"influential U.S. officials, members of the Obama transition team, members of Congress and think tanks" to lobby on behalf of democracy and human rights in Egypt. Saleh requested Department assistance in facilitating such meetings. Citing the film "Charlie Wilson's War," Saleh opined that even one member of Congress can make a significant difference.

16. (C) He laid out his movement's publicly expressed vision for a democratic Egypt, involving a three-year transitional government appointed by the judiciary followed by free and fair elections for parliament, an empowered prime minister, a weakened presidency and a new constitution. He noted that he had been in contact with unnamed members of Freedom House to discuss scheduling U.S. meetings. Saleh described a recent conversation in Cairo with an unnamed Amcit who advised him on potential Washington meetings and is working to include him in an early December dinner in New York with Egyptian activist Saad Eddin Ibrahim. Saleh said he hoped to lobby influential Washington officials in December and then again in 2009. He described the Obama administration as "the last hope" for effecting democratic change in Egypt. He lamented that although the Bush administration worked for democratic change in Egypt, "the despot (i.e. Mubarak) is still in power."

17. (C) Saleh said he had reached an understanding with Department officials that his name would not appear in USG press releases related to the summit, and reiterated his hope that his name would not appear in the Egyptian press in connection with the summit. Saleh realized that the Egyptian embassy could easily send officials to observe the summit, but told us he did not want to "help the GOE" by publicizing his participation. He requested the latest details on the conference program, noting that he did not clearly understand what kind of presentation he would be expected to deliver. We responded that we agreed with the idea of not mentioning his name in USG press statements. We also noted that the event will be public and streamed on-line, and committed to providing him with additional details on the summit.

The Youth Movement for Change

18. (C) Saleh noted that the "Youth Movement for Change" is also referred to as "April 6 Youth" after the strike it helped organize this past spring (ref D). He said there are 800 active members of the group, supplemented by 70,000 on the Internet. Saleh dismissed Israa Abdel Fattah, the "Facebook girl" who was arrested following the April 6 strikes (refs B and C), as merely "someone who makes posts on the Internet." He characterized Abdel Fattah and Ahmed Nasser as Al-Ghad party activists who are not part of his movement, and with whom he does not feel comfortable speaking. According to Saleh, the movement tries to organize events, such as a recent "Day of Love" in a Cairo park where the activists simply planned to congregate, but State Security consistently thwarts their plans. During the November 4 park event, Saleh recounted, police detained several activists as they were trying to assemble. (Note: Per ref A, police arrested members of the movement in Alexandria in July for marching in the street and singing patriotic songs. End note.) According to Saleh, police arrested one female member of the group as she was returning home from Cairo to Tanta (a Delta town approximately 75 miles north of Cairo), and then "stripped and sexually molested her" causing her subsequently to suffer a nervous breakdown. Saleh asserted that the security services attack female members of the movement to instill widespread fear. Saleh told us the movement wants to re-create strikes on April 6, 2009, but is not hopeful that it can succeed, due to pressure from the security services.

19. (S) Comment: Saleh is an idealistic young activist who was enthusiastic about speaking to us for the first time, and expressed an interest in continuing our discussion. His "Youth Movement for Change" favors replacing the regime, an approach different from more mainstream civil society organizations that advocate for incremental change through tactics such as public awareness campaigns, draft legislation and capacity building. State Security is apparently working to disrupt even the movement's most innocuous gatherings, and is preventing the movement's current activities from gaining any traction.

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